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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

REV. CLEMENT M. BUTLER,

AT THE PRESIDENT'S MANSION,

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE FUNERAL OF ABEL P. UPSHUR, T. W. GILMER, AND OTHERS,

WHO LOST THEIR LIVES BY THE EXPLOSION

ON BOARD THE PRINCETON.

FEBRUARY 28, 1844.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.



WASHINGTON:

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1844.

WASHINGTON, *March 4, 1844*

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR: In communicating to you the sincere thanks of the Committee of Arrangements, for the truly eloquent and appropriate discourse delivered by you at the President's Mansion on Saturday, I am further instructed to convey the earnest wish of the Committee, that, with a view to diffuse more extensively, and to fix more permanently, the salutary impressions produced by this address, and by the awful dispensation of Providence which furnished the occasion for it, you will confer upon them, and upon the community, the further favor of furnishing a copy of your discourse for publication.

With great respect, very sincerely, yours, &c.

RICH'D S. COXE.

On behalf of the Committee.

Rev. C. M. BUTLER,
Georgetown, D. C.

GEORGETOWN, D. C., *March 5, 1844.*

DEAR SIR: It is a source of great gratification to me to learn that the address delivered by me on Saturday, at the President's Mansion, was, in the opinion of the Committee of Arrangements, calculated to produce a salutary impression on the public mind. As it was not written, I am not able at once to furnish a copy for publication, but will be able, I trust, by this evening or to-morrow morning.

With my acknowledgments to the Committee of Arrangements for their indulgent estimate of my effort to improve this dispensation, and with thanks to yourself for the kind terms in which it is conveyed,

I remain, with great respect, sincerely yours,

C M. BUTLER

RICH'D S. COXE, Esq.

ADDRESS.

Never has it been my lot to rise in a place of mourning under so intense and profound a conviction of the inefficacy of words to add any thing of impressiveness to that which the scene itself presents, as upon this occasion. Upon ordinary occasions of mortality, it not unfrequently happens, that the words of the speaker appear to be needed to convince us, even in the presence of the dead, that we must die; to make us realize the uncertainty of life, even when we stand before the most convincing evidence of the truth. But I do not feel that it is so here and now. In this instance, the fact of death, as known to all, itself speaks with awful and appalling eloquence. The dreadful catastrophe which produced the death of the distinguished individuals whose obsequies we celebrate, lives in the ineffaceable colors of horror, in the hearts of its paralyzed spectators, and of those who have listened to their recital. So sudden, so terrific, so like the lightning execution of a word spoken by the Almighty, was the dread catastrophe, that we stand before it, pale and quivering, and confess that "the Lord—the Lord, he is God!" The speaker's task is already done for him. There is the solemn argument and the touching appeal—there is the awful fact and its impressive lesson. It is briefly and simply this: "We must die, let us prepare for it." I know my friends, that in this presence of the honored dead, you confess the cogency of the argument, and feel the subduing pathos of the appeal. There is not one of us, who is not, for the time at least, made wise and thoughtful by this awful dispensation. By it, youth has been forced into the wisdom of experienced age. By it, a strong arresting hand has been laid upon the thoughtless, compelling them to think. By it, the gay have been made grave. The statesman, arrested amid his high cares, has bent over the lifeless forms of those who were his associates but as yesterday, and as he dropped over them the tear of friendship, has felt and confessed the nothingness of renown. The Senator has paused in the responsible duties of his country's legislation, awed and solemnized by this sudden stroke of death. Giving to patriotism the hallowed spirit and accents of religion, he has uttered, in words of persuasive and lofty eloquence, lessons of the truest and purest—because of Heavenly—wisdom.* For the time at least, we all are wise, we all are thoughtful. God grant that we may be wise unto salvation!

*See the speech of the Hon. Mr. Rives, in the Senate of the United States, on the day succeeding the catastrophe upon the Princeton.

first circumstance in this fearful catastrophe which arrests our attention at the elevated station of all its victims. I know that the true worth of a man, in the eye of reason and of God, depends not at all upon its outward environment, but upon its moral characteristics. Nevertheless, consider as we are, it does more powerfully impress us to see daring death strike at the summit of life, and at one fell stroke, bring down the loftiest of Lebanon, than it does to see him pass his inexorable scythe unheeding the lowliness of the valley. As they are precipitated from their high elevation, the noise of their fall wakes a startling echo in the heart, and scatters wide spread ruin. In our human weakness, we are apt to say, "if the lofty must thus fall, then how surely must the humble." Though there is no force of logic in the deduction, because all alike are mortal, there is a salutary impression for the heart in such natural reflection. But even such an event may add nothing to the proof that we must die, which does not exist in the case of the humblest child of mortality, it does most fully enforce this lesson, that "the glory of man is as the flower of the field, and that the fashion of this world passeth away." There are but few of the lifeless remains of those of whom affection does not speak more fondly here at home, than fame speaks loudly and proudly of them abroad. One who has held two elevated offices under the present administration of honor, and discharged their duties with high reputation and success, adorned with every civic and social virtue.* †Another, citizen of the State, called but recently to the high office which he occupied at the time of his sudden death, has been distinguished in the general council of the nation, and the political history of his native State. ‡Of him who stood by his side, we may say, that none knew him but to love him—so completely were blended in him, the characteristic excellencies of his profession, with those which were peculiarly and strikingly his own. §Another of this awful calamity, a guest here, is well known in the councils of his native State. ¶And yet another, not forgotten because his remains, in obedience to the wishes of widowed love, are not here, has not only distinguished himself by his able services for his country at a foreign court, but has made for himself, by his singularly amiable and attractive character, a warm place in the hearts of his fellow-citizens at home. And of all this station, talent, and renown, this is the end—this the all! I may say I not say, *must* I not say, to the illustrious assemblage here gathered about the dead, with the respect which is due to their exalted position, yet with the fidelity which becomes the humblest minister of God, not forgetful of their responsibilities to Almighty God, forgetful of the

n. Mr. Upshur. †Hon. Mr. Gilmer. ‡Captain Kennon. §Col. Gardiner.
Mr. Maxcy.

necessity of preparation for existence beyond the tomb, they are in pursuit of fame or honor, as an end, as a substantial good, as a satisfying enjoyment, as the *enough* of their existence; must I not say to them, as the impressive lesson of this dark day, that they are in pursuit of a shining, illusive shadow, which lures them on to disappointment and to ruin! It is the child's chase after the rainbow—and when you shall fall panting and exhausted on the hill-top, where its base seemed to rest, the glory, to your eye, will have receded as far from you as ever, though you may seem to those below you in the distance, to be wrapped in its glittering radiance, as in a robe of glory. From yonder palls there comes to the men of station and renown this impressive lesson, “This world's glory is, at the best, but a poor distorted shadow of that which is real and substantial; and he whose heart is supremely and exclusively fixed upon the shadow, loses the reality. Seek ye the glory and the bliss of heaven.”

Another circumstance of this calamity, which has not failed to arrest the attention of us all, is the awful suddenness of the stroke, and the appalling contrast exhibited between the mirth and happiness of one moment, and the terror and agony of the next. A few evenings since, this hall was lighted up and adorned with the flower of the capital and country—its rank, its talent, its renown, its youth, grace, and beauty. The illustrious deceased were all here, with hearts beating with the pulses of health and of enjoyment, and with their well won honors clustering upon them. Now, they are *here*, and *so!* The next day saw them embarked with a large and gay assemblage in that wondrous ship, which seems to possess a conscious vitality, and to move over the waters at the pleasure of its own wizard will. In that vessel, freighted with rank, fashion, and beauty, consecrated for the time to purposes of festivity, as it glides over the sunny waters, with Death crouching in its awful den, ready to spring on those who dreamed not of his presence, I seem to see an affecting emblem of the life of pleasure, on which so many thoughtless ones embark, unconscious, as they glide over life's glancing waters, of approaching doom. And now, “all is merry as a marriage bell,” as the festive bark speeds on—“youth at the prow, and pleasure at the helm.” While some linger at the banquet, and some are listening to the song, these fated ones walk, smiling and unconscious, into the jaws of death. In the twinkling of an eye, on wings of flame, their souls rush into the presence of the thrice-holy, heart-searching God! My friends, I desire not to harrow up your minds by an attempt to recall the horrors that succeeded that dreadful and fatal explosion. I wish but to urge the lesson taught by that fearful transition from merriment to wo—from the light laugh of hilarity to the wail of agonized and bereaved love. Is it wise, is it right, in a world

where such things can be and are, to live as if they could not be and are not? Had you—I speak to those, especially, who were present, and to all who hear me—had you been thus suddenly summoned into the presence of a holy God, do you suppose you would have been ready to meet him? The question is not, as the heart's sophistry will endeavor to persuade some it is,—“was it, abstractly considered, right or wrong to be there?” It is a question far higher and more momentous. The question is this—Is the temper of your soul such, is its condition in the sight of God such, is the tenor of your life such, is your manifested regard to God's law such, as fits you to stand up without warning and without preparation before Him, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? It is a fearful question. I know not what you are in the sight of God, but I know what awful sayings the word of my God contains. I remember that it asks this question, and gives this answer: “Those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” I remember the question: “How shall ye escape, if ye *neglect* so great salvation?” I hear coming from this dispensation, for many a careless one, this fearful declaration: “She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.” Will any satisfy their minds by the resolution not again to place themselves in a scene of danger! Alas, my friends, we know not when we are in danger. We walk over slumbering mines. We dance on the brow of the precipice. There is never but a step between us and death. It is only because a forgotten God upholds us, that we draw our present breath. It is altogether of his mercies that we are not consumed.

An earthquake may be bid to spare
The man that's strangled by a hair!

A wiser and more solemn determination than to avoid supposed danger, is demanded of us all by this dispensation. Oh! may all here present, for whom the world has an absorbing charm, which makes them forget their God, listen to the awful lesson, delivered in thunder, and flame and blood and death, and wo and wailing, which God has addressed to this, alas! too gay, too giddy Capital!

Another circumstance in this catastrophe, which arrests all minds and moves all hearts, is the sorrow of the stricken and bereaved relatives and friends. It is, indeed, such a wo as a stranger intermeddleth not with. We would not rudely penetrate into the sacred sanctuaria of their sorrowing hearts. But we would—and find it the dictate of our hearts to do it—obey the scripture injunction which directs us to weep with those that

weep. But that we know "Earth hath no sorrow which Heaven cannot cure," it would seem that their affliction is more than they can bear. If, at this dark hour, sympathy is soothing to their hearts, we can assure them that is poured forth in full and flowing tides from the heart of this community—nay, from the national heart. If, at such a moment, earthly honors had any balm for wounded hearts, that balm would not be wanting. If—and here we speak without peradventure—if the prayer of pious hearts prevail with God—if the blessed influences of that spirit whose dear name is *Comforter*—have a soothing ministry for the stricken soul, they shall not be left un comforted—they shall see "the bright light in the cloud." And as we think of the sufferers by this calamity, let us not forget the commander of the fated ship. It is a prayer in which I am sure every heart here unites, that that gallant and accomplished officer may soon again be restored to his country's service, and that he may be spared the unavailing bitterness of a too long, too deeply cherished, sorrow and regret.

And now, in conclusion, let us bear with us to the tomb another solemn lesson which this dispensation teaches us. It is a truth broadly and brightly written in God's word, that, for national transgressions, God visits, as a nation, their offences with a rod, and their sins with scourges. Sometimes he sends disaster and gloom over the people, and sometimes he strikes down their choicest rulers. In either case, it becomes a people, and a people's legislators and rulers, to humble themselves before God, that his wrath may be turned away from them, and that his hand be not stretched out still. Now, by this dispensation, from the highest officer of the Government, from the bereaved ruler of the nation, who, at one stroke, has lost his trustiest counsellors and his choicest friends, through many intervening circles, to the hallowed one of home, there is weeping, lamentation, and wo. I altogether read amiss the design of this dispensation if it be not to bring the people to a humble confession and abandonment of their sins; to teach our judges counsel and our senators wisdom. Salutory, indeed, would be the effect of this dispensation if here and now—and what place so fit, what scene so appropriate, what "hour" so "accepted," as this place and scene and hour?—salutory, indeed, would this dispensation prove if here and now, in the hearts of this embodied representation of the people of this country, there were breathed by all the silent vow to Heaven that they would exert their personal and official influence to secure honor to God's supreme authority, obedience to God's paramount law. If the resolution here be taken to promote, by influence and example, the observance of God's holy day, to check licentiousness and dissipation, and all the national crimes which cry out to Heaven against us, then would we see light springing out of the darkness of this

dispensation. Then it would be seen how righteousness exalteth a nation. Then would God be the shield of this people's help, and its excellency. Then would it ride upon the high places of the world's renown. Then we would have no need to fear, for the Lord of Hosts would be with us—the God of Jacob would be our refuge.

I will delay the last melancholy duties to the dead no longer. My prayer is that we may pluck the plants of heavenly wisdom which will spring out of the graves of these illustrious men, and apply them to our health and healing, as individuals and as a people ! And may God grant that this awful dispensation may accomplish that whereunto he sent it !

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